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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 003459

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (DECL DATE)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: ABDULLAH AND KARZAI TO MEET ALONE OCT 28

REF: KABUL 3445

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Classified By: Ambassador Francis Ricciardone reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: Deputy Ambassador Ricciardone and UN Special Representative Kai Eide continued pressing the Abdullah and Karzai camps on October 28 to meet face-to-face to attempt to reach an understanding on whether and how they can collaborate on a reformist national unity program. In return for this, Abdullah might concede the election. Although Abdullah remains skeptical about Karzai's commitment to any real positive changes for Afghanistan in the next five years, Abdullah remains "open minded" about negotiating with Karzai for the good of Afghanistan. Late on October 25 the two sides agreed on the venue for the meeting: Abdullah yielded to Karzai, and has agreed to meet him at the presidential palace offices late this evening. Ricciardone and Eide recommended working on an outline of a future deal at that meeting, but Abdullah said that after such a rigorous campaign, any initial meeting might be just to "feel each other out." End Summary.

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Abdullah Skeptical But Open  
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¶2. (S) Abdullah, SRS Eide, and Deputy Ambassador Ricciardone met October 28 to continue attempts to nudge him to negotiate face-to-face with Karzai. Due to Eide's security restraints after the attack on the UN guest house earlier in the morning leaving at least six dead, the meeting was moved to the Embassy from the home of Dr. Abdullah. The morning's events loomed over the meeting, as Eide noted the guest house compound was primarily a UN Elect compound, casting further stress over the current period of electoral uncertainty. Hours after this meeting, Abdullah said he felt the impact of these latest victims on his decision to meet Karzai.

¶3. (S) Abdullah, in a better humor than on October 27 (reftel), said that after his discussion with Ambassador Eikenberry, he realized his October 26 press conference at which he laid down extreme conditions for participating in a second round "was a mistake." He had thought about Ambassador Eikenberry's statement that "lives were at stake" with his decisions on the elections process. Although Abdullah remains skeptical about Karzai's intentions to make any real positive changes for Afghanistan in the next five years, he said he remains open minded about negotiating with Karzai for the good of Afghanistan. Abdullah's bottom line is that he does not trust Karzai, and thinks the idea of international witnesses to the process would be helpful.

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## Venue Dispute

14. (S) Of the location options offered by Eide for Abdullah to meet one-on-one with Karzai, two seemed most probable: either Eide's residence, or Presidential "Palace II". Eide noted that his residence would be very difficult due to security limitations after the morning's attack, noting that shutting down several important streets to nearby embassies would decrease the likelihood of a discreet meeting. He said Palace II was separate from the Presidential Palace and Eide could arrange to be the host of the meeting there, and offer a photo opportunity with the UN flag in the event that the meeting leaked to the press. Abdullah, however, insisted on Eide's residence, noting that if "Karzai did not make at least this concession, it would be indicative of his absolutist bargaining position," and therefore Abdullah would prefer not to meet at all.

## Substance of an Agreement

15. (S) Ricciardone suggested some elements of a common program with Karzai, basically restating some of Abdullah's more realistic suggestions to include:

- an overhaul of the IEC and electoral process,
- a review of the electoral law to include a more democratic way of selecting governors, and
- an official position for Abdullah (perhaps as head of a Constitutional review commission).

Publicly,

- both candidates must appear together to launch a solidarity platform,

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- neither side must be humiliated,
- both should declare Abdullah's concession is based on the need to prevent more deaths and to work together to defeat the common enemies of Afghanistan,
- and agree that this concession is a legal end to the election process.

Privately,

- Karzai agrees to work with key Abdullah supporters,
- to appoint clean and competent ministers,
- and this, in turn, would allow the UN, the United States, and the world community to affirm their support for the Karzai-Abdullah solidarity platform.

Abdullah said all of these were good starting points, and Karzai would no doubt be amenable to most, but voiced concern that after a rigorous campaign period, this first meeting would likely be an opportunity to "feel each other out." He understood time was short. Eide agreed to set the meeting up for the evening of Oct. 28, pending Karzai's acceptance.

## Meeting Set

16. (S) Karzai Chief of Staff Daudzai told us later that Karzai would not accept meeting Abdullah at Eide's residence, but instead Palace II was an acceptable option. After several more conversations with Ricciardone and Eide, Abdullah finally relented. As of 19:00 Kabul time, the two sides plan to meet at Palace II at 21:00, where Eide will be photographed with both parties in front of the UN flag.

EIKENBERRY